

CRISTIN TIERNEY

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Shaun Leonardo The Art Show

Park Avenue Armory, New York

November 2 – 5, 2023

Benefit Preview Day: November 1, 2023

Cristin Tierney Gallery is pleased to present Shaun Leonardo's *The Messengers* series at The Art Show this November. The fair opens with a benefit preview on November 1st and continues through Sunday, November 5th.

Leonardo will be participating in the fair's "Meet the Artists" event on Sunday, November 5th from 12 – 3:00 pm, where visitors will have the opportunity to connect with the artist in-person.

Much of Leonardo's *oeuvre* is inspired by the childhood role models, popular icons and cultural stereotypes that influence perceptions of what it means to be a man of color. The decision by Leonardo to focus on the hands of his chosen spiritual teachers speaks to these themes. Hands are for working, holding, creating, writing, communicating, and more.

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The Messengers depicts pairs of disembodied hands of people of color. The paintings are made from sign enamel on MDF cutouts. The hands were sourced from photographs of real people—ranging from well-known figures like James Baldwin and Toni Morrison to Leonardo’s close friend Joe Coleman and his mentor Dr. David Driskell—whom the artist considers modern-day prophets, embodying unmatched wisdom. They have all had a long-lasting impact on Leonardo’s self-perception, often through their words and actions rather than their creative mediums.

Their hands are rendered by Leonardo in expressive hues on crisply delineated fields resembling camouflage or topographical maps. Many of the hands make gestures that are recognizable to the subject, while others are not so immediately familiar. Capturing an iconic gesture, *Nina (Nina Simone)* illustrates the singer’s hands mid-clap, a staple of Simone’s transcendent live performances.

Although prophets are thought to have connections to the divine, Leonardo’s paintings highlight their work on the earthly plane, often in service to greater causes. Through the memories and souls of these generous figures, *The Messengers* underscores our common bonds and obligations to each other.

Shaun Leonardo (b. 1979, Queens, NY) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work negotiates societal expectations of manhood, namely definitions surrounding Black and brown masculinities, along with its notions of achievement, collective identity, and experience of failure. His performance practice, anchored by his work in Assembly—a diversion program for system-impacted youth at the arts nonprofit Recess, where he is Co-Director—is participatory and invested in a process of embodiment.

Leonardo received his MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute and is a recipient of support from Creative Capital, Guggenheim Social Practice, Art for Justice, and A Blade of Grass. His work has been featured at The Guggenheim Museum, the High Line, and New Museum, and profiled in *The New York Times* and *CNN*. His solo exhibition, *The Breath of Empty Space*, was presented at MICA, MASS MoCA, and The Bronx Museum. And his first major public art commission, *Between Four Freedoms*, premiered at Four Freedoms Park Conservancy, in the fall of 2021. The artist has a studio in Brooklyn, NY.

Founded in 2010, **Cristin Tierney Gallery** is a contemporary art gallery located on The Bowery with a deep commitment to the presentation, development, and support of a roster of both established and emerging artists. Its program emphasizes artists engaged with critical theory and art history, with an emphasis on conceptual, video, and performance art. Education and audience engagement is central to our mission.

Image

Shaun Leonardo, *Nina (Nina Simone)*, 2020. sign enamel and pearlescent pigment on MDF. 47 1/2 x 41 1/2 x 3/4 inches (120.7 x 105.4 x 1.9 cm).

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